

2017 IN REVIEW

Year for champs, and firsts, in Mid-Columbia

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Great athletes, great teams. Schools that added volumes to their storied sports histories and others that penned some early pages.

Twenty-seventeen featured some of the greatest moments in the history of Mid-Columbia sports, and with the new year upon us, we at the Herald would like to take some time to celebrate the accomplishments of local teams and athletes over the past 12 months.

So without further ado, here's a look back at our Top 10 sports story lines from 2017:

1. RICHLAND FOOTBALL GOES 14-0, WINS STATE

The Richland football team capped its perfect season in the perfect way with a 28-21, gut-wrenching victory over Woodinville at the Tacoma Dome to capture its third state title in school history and the first



The Richland football team celebrates after beating Woodinville 28-21 to win the WIAA 4A state championship at the Tacoma Dome on Dec. 2.

since 1999. The victory also secured Richland its first perfect season in the modern era.

In a redemption match after falling to Camas in the 2016 championship game, the Bombers did all their scoring in the first half while shutting out the Falcons, then hung on for dear life after halftime to claim victory.

The team featured several players on the All-Area first team, including Player of the Year Adam Weissenfels and co-coach Mike Neidhold, and Weissenfels (defensive back), quarterback Cade Jensen and defensive lineman Jax Lee were named at least to the AP 4A All-State first team.

2. WEISSENFELS COMES UP CLUTCH, NAMED STATE POTY

With Richland struggling to finish off Woodinville in the state championship, the Bombers needed every one of Weissenfels' 4A final-tying three interceptions to hoist the trophy. He also caught a touchdown pass in that game, forced a fumble,

kicked four extra points and returned four punts for 77 yards on the state's biggest stage, and turned some heads in the process.

Finishing the season with 16 total touchdowns and 11 interceptions, the senior 'Swiss Army Man' was voted the Associated Press' 4A state player of the year, as voted on by media members from around Washington.

Weissenfels was also the MCC's defensive player of the year and an All-MCC first team wide receiver and defensive back.

3. RICHLAND BOYS BASKETBALL PLACES 5TH AT STATE

Despite showing up to the Tacoma Dome as a 19-win MCC champ, the Richland boys basketball team was something of a Cinderella story at the state tournament, ranked No. 11 in RPI.

But the Bombers showed they meant business when they shocked No. 3 Davis 63-51 in the first round, then downed perennial powerhouse No. 4 Federal Way 61-57 in the quarterfinals. The clock struck midnight a

little early, however, as they fell by two points to top-seeded Union in the semis, then to Gonzaga Prep for the third time on the season, in the third-/fifth-place game.

Then-junior Riley Sorn, a 7-foot-3 post, obliterated the 4A tournament blocks record with 35 over the four games, and turned enough heads to earn a spot on the All-Tournament team. The now-graduated Tyler Kurtz (the All-MCC and All-Area Player of the Year) was on the All-Tournament team as well.

4. 2 AMERICANS TAKEN IN 1ST ROUND OF NHL DRAFT

Just having one Tri-City American selected in the first round of the NHL Draft is excitement enough, but Michael Rasmussen and Juuso Välimäki accomplished something a pair of Ams hadn't done in more than 20 years.

Rasmussen, a forward out of Surrey, B.C., became the highest-drafted American since Carey Price (fifth to Montreal in '05) when the Detroit Red Wings selected him ninth overall, and Finland-native Välimäki became the first Tri-City de-

SEE STORIES, 10A



Kamakin's defense – from the left, Bela Nicacio, Rylie Clark, Grace Wilbur (keeper), Kaylee Kraft and Emma Johnson – helped the team go 20-1 and take third in the state tournament.

FROM PAGE 9A STORIES

fenseman taken in the first round since 2003 when the Calgary Flames took him with the No. 16 pick. That made them the first Tri-City duo to go in the first round since 1996.

Rasmussen had 32 goals and 23 assists for the Americans in a 2016-17 season cut short by a wrist injury, while Välimäki finished with 19 goals and 42 assists.

5. KAMIAKIN GIRLS BASKETBALL PLACES 4TH AT STATE

The story for the Kamiakin girls basketball team all season had been sophomore All-MCC and All-Area Player of the Year Oumou Toure, but it was a Chancellor Williams buzzer-beating putback that lifted the Braves to a 64-62 overtime win over Lynnwood and a fourth-place finish at the state tournament.

Kamiakin (which finished the season 25-2 with MCC and sub-regional championships) took fifth the year before – lost by 37 to the same Lynnwood team in third-/fifth-place game – led by much of the same core they had in 2016-17 and is back again this season.

Toure was an honorable mention on the Associated Press' 3A All-State team.

6. MID-COLUMBIA BRINGS HOME HARDWARE FROM MAT CLASSIC

Southridge senior Zayid Al-Ghani and Pasco freshman Isaiah Gonzalez won individual titles at Mat Classic, and the Kamiakin Braves finished third in the Class 3A team standings.

Al-Ghani beat Keith Pablo of Marysville-Pilchuck 5-2 in the Class 3A 170-pound championship match to put his name next to Eric Schwartz's (101-pound title in 1997) on the championship wall. They are the only Southridge wrestlers to win state titles since the school opened 20 years ago.

Gonzalez was tough to beat, tearing through his first state wrestling tournament and outscoring his opponents 24-0. He used an escape in the second round against Tahoma's Austin Michaelski for the only point he needed in a 1-0 victory in the Class 4A 113-pound title match.

The Othello Huskies have had at least one state champion since 2008, and the tradition continued when Reese Jones won the Class 2A 170-pound title with a 3-2 come-from-behind victory over Ryan Redford of White River. The tears of joy kept flowing in the Othello camp as senior TJ Martinez, in his first trip to the Tacoma Dome, won the 195-pound title.

7. SOUTHRIDGE BASEBALL 2ND AT STATE; MARTIN TEARS UP GULF COAST LEAGUE

Characteristic of the gritty way the Southridge baseball

team had battled through the spring, Noah Weber scored the walk-off run of the Suns' 5-4 state semifinal victory over Mercer Island on a passed ball.

Southridge wound up losing its second-ever state championship game by a score of 5-1 to Gig Harbor the following day, but there was no denying how special the 23-5 campaign was.

Then, after getting selected in the 17th round of the MLB draft by the Pittsburgh Pirates, Southridge's Mason Martin went on to break the Gulf Coast Rookie League's home run record (finished with 11, record was nine) despite playing in just 39 of the GCL Pirates' 60 games. Martin, who split his time between the outfield and first base, hit .307 in his first pro season and added eight doubles and 22 RBIs to his impressive home run total.

8. BRITNEY ZAMORA DRIVES AWAY WITH POINTS TITLE

Kennewick's Brittany Zamora became the first woman, and the youngest driver, to win a Northwest Super Late Model touring series when she captured the championship in September.

Zamora, who graduated from Kennewick High School in June, made headlines June 17 when she won the Home Insulation Battle of the Burg 125 race at Douglas County Speedway in Roseburg, Ore.

Zamora's win in Roseburg was the first ever race win by a female in the series, and at the time made her the first female to lead the points standings.

Zamora, driving Lucy – her black and green Ford with the No. 52 splashed on the side – finished the season with two wins and topped the points standing with 380, holding off Jan Evans of Wenatchee (346).

9. KAMIAKIN GIRLS, PASCO BOYS SOCCER REACH CHAMPIONSHIP WEEKENDS

In their sixth playoff meeting in the past three years, the Pasco boys soccer team finally upended Central Valley 3-2 in the state semifinals to reach its first championship match since 2009.

The Bulldogs lost to Todd Beamer 2-1 in the finals, capping an 18-5 season that saw them win their third straight MCC championship. Now-graduated Jesus Meraz Rodriguez scored 23 goals on the season to push his career total to 86, earning him a second straight All-Area Player of the Year nod.

The fall season belonged to the Kamiakin girls team, which was all about firsts; the first team to reach the playoffs with an undefeated record in coach Chris Erikson's 31 years at the helm, and the first Braves squad to win its final game of a state tournament.

Unfortunately that victory, 1-0 over Bellevue, was in the third-place consolation game after Kamiakin fell to eventual champ Mercer Island 4-2 in the semis. Kamiakin finished the season with a 20-1 record, and will return as many as five All-Area first-team players to next year's squad.

10. HERMISTON, ROYAL FOOTBALL WIN STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Richland Bombers weren't the only local team to hoist a state football trophy. Hermiston captured its second OSAA title (both in the past four years) and Royal earned a three-peat for the WIAA 1A crown.

Hermiston's 34-12 victory over Churchill to cap an 11-2 season in the title game served as a proverbial mic drop as the school was granted membership into the WIAA (and the Mid-Columbia Conference) beginning in the 2017-18 academic year. The move allows the Bulldogs to avoid a disastrous travel situation that would have arisen as a result of the OSAA's upcoming classification realignment.

For Royal, winning championships is nothing new, but that didn't take anything away from this one, the eighth in program history and third in a row.

The Knights took down Meridian 33-27 in the 1A state title game for their third straight perfect season (good for 41 consecutive wins) and seventh state championship under 18-year coach Wiley Allred, who was announced as the Seahawks High School Coach of the Year and a future member of the Washington State High School Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame a couple weeks ago.

Honorable mention: Kamiakin cross country wins state meet, ending streak of 11 straight titles for North Central. The Braves' leading tandem, Jonah Franco and Ryan Child, finished fourth and fifth, respectively.

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